

What is a comprehensive plan?

Comprehend: to see the nature, significance, or meaning of: grasp mentally

Comprehensive: covering a matter under consideration completely or nearly completely: accounting for or comprehending all or virtually all pertinent considerations: Inclusive

Plan: a course of action worked out beforehand

As it relates to municipalities:

- A comprehensive plan is an official public document that is adopted by a local government.
- The contents of the plan are comprehensive, general, and long range.
- "Comprehensive" means that the plan addresses all geographical parts of the community and all functional elements that can affect physical development.
- "General" means that the plan includes general policies and designations, not detailed regulations.
- "Long Range" means that the plan looks beyond pressing current issues to problems and possibilities years in the future.

A comprehensive plan, particularly under Texas law, does not constitute zoning regulations or establish zoning district boundaries.

Texas law on municipal comprehensive plans

§ 213.002. Comprehensive Plan

(a) The governing body of a municipality may adopt a comprehensive plan for the long-range development of the municipality. A municipality may define the content and design of a comprehensive plan.

(b) A comprehensive plan may:

- (1) include but is not limited to provisions on land use, transportation, and public facilities;
- (2) consist of a single plan or a coordinated set of plans organized by subject and geographic area; and
- (3) be used to coordinate and guide the establishment of development regulations.

(c) A municipality may define, in its charter or by ordinance, the relationship between a comprehensive plan and development regulations and may provide standards for determining the consistency required between a plan and development regulations.

(d) Land use assumptions adopted in a manner that complies with Subchapter C, Chapter 395, may be incorporated in a comprehensive plan.

§ 213.005. Notation on Map of Comprehensive Plan

A map of a comprehensive plan illustrating future land use shall contain the following clearly visible statement: "A comprehensive plan shall not constitute zoning regulations or establish zoning district boundaries."

Added by Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 459, § 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1997.

Renumbered from § 219.005 by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1420, § 12.002(2), eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

City of Houston law on comprehensive planning

The City's Code of Ordinance, Chapter 33, Section III, establishes the Planning Commission, mandates a comprehensive plan, and outlines the general procedures for producing a comprehensive plan.

Beginning the process toward a comprehensive plan

Step One: the Vision Statement

"Vision Statement" means the formal expression of its vision that depicts in words and images what the local government is striving to become and that serves as the starting point for the creation and implementation of the local comprehensive plan¹.

An example of a values-driven process, cited by "The 21st Century Comprehensive Plan," is the FOCUS process used in Kansas City:

"The FOCUS Plan² was completed in two phases. During Phase I the Mayor, City Council, and the FOCUS Steering Committee guided an innovative citizen participation process, which resulted in a new Policy Plan for Kansas City. The Policy Plan establishes a vision of Kansas City as a people centered community and provides fourteen Principles of Policy to help us in guiding key decisions throughout the city, not just in City Hall."

"The FOCUS vision statement and principles of policy were adopted by the City Council in 1994 as Kansas City's public policy framework. This framework provides a strong foundation for addressing complex issues in a more strategic manner. In addition, the policy principles are also the foundation for Phase II: The Comprehensive and Strategic Plan."

Conclusion

No conjecture about the nature or details of a Houston General Plan can proceed without the first phase, the establishment of a vision and set of values, with goals and priorities, all determined by consensus among the broadest possible group of citizens. Counties do not have the power to enact comprehensive plans under Texas law, so the first phase would be toward a plan for the City of Houston. However, in the 21st century, a municipal plan must be devised within the context of regional complexity, and it should be obvious that the second phase of such a process would necessarily address regional issues as they affect the policies of the City of Houston.

¹ American Planning Association, GROWING SMARTSM LEGISLATIVE GUIDEBOOK, <http://www.planning.org/guidebook/Guidebook.htm#1>, Chapter 7

² Kansas City Planning and Development, <http://www.kcmo.org/planning.nsf/focus/about?opendocument>